

Close-up



The political value of an experience

Notes from a dialogue between Fr. Julián Carrón and a group of students involved in university elections. (Milan, April 29, 2019).

Julián Carrón. We continue on our journey, starting from the two beautiful songs we just sang—*Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow?* and *Sou Feliz Senhor*¹—which take us back to what we said at the Exercises in December (“What Can Withstand the Test of Time?”). “Will you still love me tomorrow?” To whom can we say this? And then, “I am happy, Lord, because you walk with me.” There is only joy in life if we lean not on ourselves, but on One who is present, who is alive because He is risen; only if we do not depend on our own capacity. It is wonderfully liberating! Let’s begin.

Intervention. *I would like to share a few things that happened today. We started our election campaign for student representatives at the university and it was really exhilarating. There is a boldness as we begin. A conversation with a friend this morning struck me. She told me how, last year, she hadn’t gotten involved in the elections, but limited herself to passing by and looking, “remaining, however,” she said, “almost outside the room,” as if she was looking through a window but felt like she could not*

and did not want to get fully involved. Now a year has passed and she said, “This morning I woke up and for me, the fact that campaigning started today and we could distribute flyers was a problem, in the sense that it concerns me and I could not just pass by.” She did not suddenly say, “I am excitedly throwing myself into this,” but, “I woke up and saw that it interests me; I could not just say, “That’s for them to do; I’m not going.” This does not seem like a big deal, but really it is, because it means that over the year she has acquired reasons for entrusting herself to her friends, so if “they”—meaning us, her friends in the community—are going to distribute flyers, she cannot be indifferent to it. I think this also connects to the songs. Maybe a person doesn’t get involved because of fear, or because they have a certain temperament, but, with some skepticism rooted in her fragility, she poses the question, “Will you still love me tomorrow?” At the same time, she wakes up and discovers that the fact that her friends are getting involved in the election campaigns interests her. This means something has happened over the last year that changed things. This observation is related to the question I carry as I go into the elections, a question I am asking in absolutely positive terms,

¹ “Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow?” by Gerry Goffin and Carole King—The Shirelles, 1960; “Sou Feliz Senhor”, in *Canti* (Milan: Soc. Coop. Ed. Nuovo Mondo, 2008), 308.

not out of skepticism: What does getting involved in the campaign have to do with all the open questions we have about life? Because the person, the subject, who goes to distribute flyers over the coming days does not insert a new chip into himself and become a “politician,” pausing his life; he is the same person. I have a ton of open questions and I wonder, “What does the beauty I saw this morning have to do with those parts of my life that seem up in the air right now, that do not add up? This is the question I carry going into this period.

Carrón. What does all you just recounted suggest to you? We said before, “Do not remain on the threshold of things,” so what does it mean to see a person in whom an interest is reborn, who, seeing you in action, cannot just “pass by”? What made that possible? Everything rests on this. The fact that, in a year, the friend you were talking about went from being—I’ll put it this way—passive, skeptical, and apathetic to finding herself with a new interest in life and in the things around her is not at all to be taken for granted. We cannot take the change that happens in us for granted. Instead, we try to identify sufficient reasons for this change. If we do not grasp the origin of what happened to that girl, in the end nothing will remain. She had the good fortune of having that experience, but what does it have to do with me, with the elections, and what does it have to do with the way I begin to get involved this year? We’ll leave the question open. Anyone else?

Intervention. As I was listening, something that happened in my life that is analogous to the one just described came to mind. It just happened to me today, but I was not amazed.

Carrón. You see? Do you understand the point? If he had not come here tonight, and had not listened to the person before him recounting that episode, he would not have “discovered” what had happened to him today with amazement and would not have really registered what happened. Sometimes we ask, “Why do I have to come here?” Or why did that girl participate in a place like for years? Why? To be reawakened, just as you were reawakened while our friend was speaking, and you realized that what had “just happened today” had slipped by almost unobserved. This is why I told you not to take for granted what we are observing here. The fact that this girl realizes she cannot just pass by, that one of her friends, hearing what she said, is amazed and repeats the story here, and that you, hearing him describe this, consider it a call to attention; all these things are not the fruit of something already known, a formula you can apply; instead, it is the dynamic of a life. If you had not come here this evening, if he had not been attentive to what happened to him this morning with his friend, if he had not taken notice of it, the chain that reached all the way to you, and through you, to all of us, would have been broken. It is not that things are not happening—they are!—the

question is what kind of education is needed so that these occurrences build up our lives, just as they built up the life of that girl over the course of a year, so that she went from being apathetic and skeptical and, at a certain point, started to have faith. The year that passed was not useless for her—it would only have been useless if she had sat there in the community like a stone. Even with many distractions, mistakes, and times when we do not involve ourselves in a proposal, everything that happens leaves its trace in us. The question posed by the Exercises (both for you and those we had for the adults) and on which we continue to work is this: tomorrow—tomorrow!—will any part of what we are doing now remain, or is everything destined to last only one night, only one day, by chance? Go ahead.

Intervention. So now I will relate what happened to me, hoping it will be useful. A friend told me how he always goes home over the weekend, and once a month he gets together with old friends who are now spread out all over Italy: some from the Movement, others not. Last weekend, he saw them and after the usual kind of evening, not doing anything but playing poker and passing the time, he told me, “For the first time, I wanted to take them aside and say, ‘Guys, I can’t go on like this.’ Because of the experience I’ve lived in the last few years, I wanted to look them in the face and say: ‘If we are together, it’s to live a fullness, not to fill a void, because I can’t take this anymore.’” And he said it

“It is more radical than that. It has to do with your humanity, with the thing we all need in order not to go to bed hopeless.”

proudly. “I’ve never said something like that.” I thought it was very similar to the story told at the beginning.

Carrón. This is interesting. Why, at a certain point, does a person say he can’t take it anymore? Often we don’t even recognize these things. What do you think makes a person say, “I can’t take it anymore,” if spending the evening doing nothing is what everybody does? What must have happened to him to say something like that, even to be proud of saying so, aware of the newness of what he is saying?

Intervention. *If I think of myself, I understand what it means. I have, in fact, also seen something happen that I never would have imagined, which was spending time with people whose friendship, over time, raised the bar of my expectations for everything.*

Carrón. And what does this mean with regards to the question of what withstands the test of time? Because he could have said, “On many evenings I go to the Diaconia and participate in the Movement’s gestures, but then with my old friends, I spend the night doing nothing”; instead, no, at a certain point he can’t take it anymore. Why not?

Intervention. *Because you can’t shake it off anymore.*

Carrón. Perfect. You can’t shake it off anymore. But what is it you can’t shake? We need to come to terms with this because a person could say, “See? Nothing stays with me,

so why do I have to keep participating?” or “Why do I have to make the sacrifice of coming here and going to School of Community?” or “Why should I go to the Easter Triduum?” But what he experienced remained, it did not disappear—*poof*—and at a certain point, when he saw his old friends again, looking at their usual way of being together, it was discordant, he couldn’t take it anymore. Why not? Because what he saw over the last months set his “I” into motion, it raised the bar of his awareness. The fact that you told us about it is the sign that the novelty of what has happened has not passed you by unobserved. Who was reminded, listening to these two stories, of incidents or things that struck you in the last few days?

Intervention. *This theme of change made me look again at what happened to me this week. During the Easter Triduum, I had the experience of feeling that the powerful announcement that Christ can be everything for my life has been directed to me. It really shook me and made me think, and in the following days I started to think, “We say that change does not depend on us, but on an Other, but if Christ is everything for my life, when I go back to the university and throw myself into what is waiting for me there, I should be very productive, so that everyone can see this, in some way.” This made it hard for*



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me to understand the invitation you extended to us to overcome a psychological view of our change. Then, I went away to spend time studying with some friends and I noticed that, little by little, the impact I perceived during the Easter Triduum began to fade inside me. The more I tried to force myself to be present to things, to be convincing in the eyes of others, the more I realized that I was not able to be myself; deep down I felt fake. Even though none of my friends who were with me noticed it, I could see it in so many little gestures and I said to myself, "This is not who I am!" More and more, I looked at myself and said, "It feels like I am quietly betraying everything that has happened to me." And that killed me. I thought, "I cannot love myself; I disgust myself." Then, one evening, at the height of my feeling that way, there was a deep moment of sharing with friends, characterized by a beautiful way of looking at what was happening among us in those days together. My first reaction, however, was to look down and think, "Now I'll mind my own business," as if to say, "It's something that doesn't apply to me, because in any case I betray it, because, because, because..." At that moment, seeing what was happening around me, I said to myself, "Right now, psychologically, I am a disaster, I cannot even manage to love myself—which would seem like the most natural attitude—but what is happening in front of me here is exceptional, it is something really great." So I lifted my head and looked at my friends who were talking. I didn't say anything—it's not as if my emotional state was overcome; no, I was as sad as before, but I was present; with all my objections, I was present. I was amazed how that night when I went to bed, I wasn't hopeless, feeling that nothing could redeem my smallness. I was still sad—and still had the question, "How can what has happened to me take an ever-greater hold over every part of me?"—but deep down, I was at peace. The next day, despite all the goodness of

what had happened, I became demoralized and thought, "Now the elections are happening and I have been working on them for two months; I can't take it anymore. I cannot wait for them to be over so I can get back to studying; let's hope they go well because if they don't it will be a real mess." In the meantime, a girl called me and asked me if we could get together with a few of her friends. "That way you can help us discover again the reason we work on the elections," she said. Immediately I thought, "What? I have been proposing this to everyone for two months, and now I have lost the will to do so; what kind of authority, what kind of nerve would it take to go to those people and tell them it is worth it?" And, just like the evening before, in listening to her say to me, "I desire that the days ahead of us be an opportunity to experience the weight of a new life that fills us with a greater passion for everything, just as the flyer on the European elections proposes," I found myself thinking, "I have lost the will to do it, emotionally I am feeling down, but how I desire it, how I desire the life you are placing before my eyes once again; I have lost the will to do it, but how I desire this for myself!" After I returned from the study vacation, I got together with that little group of friends for dinner and it was very beautiful, because none of them had much interest in politics, but all of them, in one way or another, had seen people who had started to get involved who did so because they participated in a life that was overflowing, an overflowing richness of existence that made the reality that belongs to everyone, in this case, the

university, interesting for them. Because of what they had seen, these students, who did not at all have the political bug, set to work: some handled the flyers, some started thinking about the best way to move forward and go out to meet others, etc. This filled me with such gratitude that, this morning, the day when the campaigning finally began, I woke up two hours earlier than usual. My lack of will was what it was, but I was full of desire, of asking, so that going to pick up the packets with flyers, doing all that I had to, was like a huge prayer that what I had seen in the days before—with my friends on the study vacation, in that girl who grabbed me and got me involved in that dinner, and during the Easter Triduum—could take hold of my life more and more. I am not sure what that will mean for me, but I desire it. The day today was an emotional teetering back and forth between an anguished, “Who knows what will happen here, who knows what will happen there,” and the surprise of being able to say, “Deep down, this exceptionality, this change continues to happen again before my eyes.” It’s what the first intervention described, and I saw it this morning among us.

Carrón. What then, is this change? You have to fully grasp the meaning of what you have said, because if we do not grow in our awareness of the origin of what happens to us, in the end we will consider change to be something that depends on our own capacity. We need to come to understand the reasons, the meaning, behind what we live. What kind of change did you see and where does it come from?

Intervention. *I have a hard time defining it analytically, but what I saw was the difference in the way my friends treated each other, recalling each other to attention. It was in the way that, this morning, at the very beginning of the election campaigning, many freshman went up to strangers almost as if it was a party. This is the change that accompanies me and...*

Carrón. This is what you saw outside of yourself, in your friends. I am interested, in addition to this, in what you have seen in yourself.

Intervention. *The change I have noticed in myself, which was clear that night with my friends when we went to study together (so much so that I said, “This is something new for me”) is that my discouragement, my betrayal, my view of my own smallness did not win out; what won out was what was happening.*

Carrón. This is very important. How were you when you went to bed [that night]? Repeat what you said.

Intervention. *I went to bed saddened, but full of hope.*

Carrón. Exactly. You also put it, “Not hopeless, but at peace.” You are all here precisely because the contribution you can receive and give to everyone by your involvement in the elections is not just about the situation at the university (doing all that representatives do, and so needing to take certain positions and get votes from others); it is more radical than that. It has to do with your humanity, with the thing we all need in order not to go to bed hopeless. This is infinitely more essential and more powerful: it is the response to

our drama and the drama lived by all those we meet, that drama you yourself perceived to be inside of you. What we have the grace of bringing to others by committing ourselves, by getting involved in the elections, is not just a contribution for confronting the problems within the university, but it is the answer to the true need people have, starting with us. The only thing we still need to understand, then—I am opening up the question again—is the political value of what happened to us, of what happened to you and to all of us here. If you reduce the value of all your efforts simply to the number of seats won in the election, instead of recognizing that the value is in what you have just told us, you are missing out on the best part. In fact, if you make a killing in the university elections, but despair wins out in you, what kind of Europe can we build?

This is why we have to understand the cultural significance (as we said at the Exercises) of the things we do, otherwise we reduce politics to winning seats. And then, if involvement is just a concern for those with the political bug, a person can say, I don’t have the bug. But we have not caught the political bug, we have caught the bug of life, the bug of not going to bed hopeless; we have the bug of being at peace, of being aware of that overflowing richness of being that has reached all of us. This is the bug we have. Are you interested? We are not aficionados of a reduced politics, we are aficiona-

dos of politics in the most noble sense of the term, of that which pertains to the *polis*, meaning all the people we meet in daily life, that they may all experience the good they are seeking. The fact that your friends are living something wonderful has been a good for you. But what they have witnessed to you, just as it is a good for you, likewise can be a good for everyone, that good that we all, consciously or subconsciously, await. In that sense, we are talking about the common good, but not according to the idea of common good we usually have in mind. Is anything more truly a “common good” than what happened to you, which can be offered to others? Is this relevant for politics or is it simply an abstraction without any impact on history? What you described is a new life. And, perhaps, if not for the opportunity you had with the university elections, you may not have recognized so clearly what was happening to you. Not a single circumstance, then, is isolated from the rest of life: our life is one—we studied this in the School of Community—and everything can have a part in building up your “I.” In this way, your experience at the university, year after year, can bring you to have that faith and trust described by the first person who spoke, a trust rooted deeper and deeper within you. Are you interested or not?

Intervention. *I am very interested, because, in reality, I still don't have a good understanding of the nature of this movement toward all people, this cultural impulse that I desire and also recognize in myself, and that I have intuited cannot be separated from a growth in my own awareness. I want to tell you about something that happened to me while organizing the gesture for Holy Week. For me, it was a continual battle between affirming myself and affirming something “other,” which asserted itself before my eyes. It was the priest who was guiding the gesture who made me more aware of it, who helped me change my attitude in front of it by telling us, “Do not concern yourselves with trying to capture what is about to happen, rather let yourselves be wounded.” All the anxiety that had accumulated in the process of organizing the gesture dissipated the moment someone placed that suggestion before me.*

Carrón. You see? If you had not put yourself into play,

even tentatively or awkwardly, even trying to affirm yourself, you would not have given another person the opportunity to help you to become aware of everything you said. This is the constant comparison we need to make with the life of the Movement. You make your attempts, as Peter did when He told Jesus, “No, not to Jerusalem, for goodness sake!” There was an Other who corrected him, who put him back on track, but if Peter had just thought it without saying a word, Jesus could not have added His contribution to Peter’s attempt. You made your attempt; yes, it was an ironic attempt, always lacking something, as with every attempt, but the fact that you made it is essential; doing so allowed you to take a step: it allowed another person to correct you and allowed you, by accepting the correction, to truly bring to completion what you had begun. A person in your shoes could have said, “Since there is a risk of doing something wrong, I won’t do anything, that way I am sure not to make a mistake.” It’s precisely what Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for in the parable of the talents, “To ensure that I do not use it poorly, I will bury the talent, that way you cannot rebuke me for anything.” “What do you mean I cannot rebuke you? I do rebuke you, strongly, because you could have at least deposited it in the bank!”

Only those who take risks, tentatively and somewhat ironically, ever gain anything. We are not distressed that yours is an ironic attempt: it is up to Him to bring it to completion, carrying you further than you could have reached on your own. And that makes for a totally different story.

Intervention. *I recognize this in my experience, but a question arises inside of me, or maybe more of a doubt: often, the advantage of following an ironic attempt, of risking, of launching yourself toward other people, toward something outside of you is not obvious. I don't know if that's clear.*

Carrón. Of course it is!

Intervention. *It's the experience I have in my community, where it is much easier to become discouraged, turning in on ourselves rather than going out toward others.*

Carrón. This is why I am praising what you did, because you put the emphasis on your mistake that another per-

“This is enough: being open. The rest will come as you walk the road. This frees you. Otherwise, you get stuck before even starting.”

son had to correct. I was saying that your action was decisive for you and for the other person who corrected you. Your action was not automatic, and you could have thought, “If I have to risk doing something wrong, it’s better not to do anything.” Instead, you made an attempt, and that is worth something. As you saw, this has a value, even if the temptation you often have is to pull back. Therefore, first, do not take what happened in you thanks to your involvement in preparing the Easter Triduum for granted. Don’t take it for granted because you could have chosen not to act. This is already an indication that the Mystery was involved with you and had reawakened you, as the first intervention offered: a girl, thanks to the path she had walked for over a year, found herself interested in the university elections for the first time. Further down the road, you can also discover that, in pursuing these interests, you end up navel-gazing, as you said happened to you; all right, but that cannot cancel out the good of your attempt, of your taking action. We will see whether, because of the interest that was awakened in her, that girl will make her attempt, which may need to be corrected or further developed in order to ar-

rive at its completion. “The perfect is the enemy of the good,” they say, because in waiting to be perfect, we never put ourselves in play. Do not be afraid of being imperfect. What you have been recounting is very interesting because it is liberating. Do not worry about everything being perfect before interjecting to say “A” or “B.” Say what you want to say, make your ironic attempt. I always use this expression, “ironic attempt,”² because it frees me: I do not have to wait to be perfect to speak or act. We are all poor wretches and our attempts will always be ironic. Before speaking, I do not, each time, have to be able to say with certainty, “This is dogma, this is crystal clear, this is so clear that there is not a hint of fog.” Most of the time, we are not able to say this, at least I cannot. This is why I say ours is always an ironic attempt, a fact that frees us to be able to put it into play. And the Mystery who takes care of you will place someone beside you who will say, “Look, I will bring you there; I will carry your attempt all the way over here.”

Intervention. *How, then, can we help each other? Is the attempt enough? If I think about my own responsibility for guiding the expression of our presence at the university, I wonder: Is my attempt*

enough to accomplish that task? Is my attempt enough to help us not fall into becoming mere event organizers?

Carrón. It’s enough! I mean that it’s enough for now—you will learn the rest down the road. Because if you impose prerequisites—what I do has to be perfect, it has to be complete, it has to be impeccable—then of course you will conclude, “I am not up to it.” Am I right? But who is up to it? Raise your hand if you are up to doing something perfectly. Who? No one. You can, however, make an attempt. I am not asking if you are prepared enough, if you already figured out all the consequences, I am just asking, “Are you open and willing?” You could say to me, “You’re asking me?” Just as the person who spoke before you could have said, “You had to come to me?” A person may feel inadequate, and in a profound sense we all are, but that has nothing to do with being open. Are you open? Yes, I am asking you (remember *The Calling of St. Matthew* by Caravaggio): Are you open? Period. This is enough: being open. The rest will come as you walk the road. This frees you. Otherwise, you get stuck before even starting. Wouldn’t you like for your ironic attempt to get better and for someone else to contribute? Wouldn’t you like that?

² In 1976, Fr. Giussani told a group of university students: “The presence ‘acts’ with ironic, not cynical attempts; irony is the opposite of cynicism, because it makes you take part in something, but with a certain detachment—because you recognize its fragility—and a sense of peace, because it is filled with passion for the already immanent Ideal. Thus, we can be agile in changing tomorrow what we did today, free from what we do and the forms that we necessarily give to our attempts.” Luigi Giussani, *Dall’utopia alla presenza* [From utopia to presence] 1975-1978 (Milan: BUR, 2006), 72.

Know, then, that someone will contribute, an Other will procure a contribution for you; He who died and rose for you will add His contribution to your attempt. “He who did not spare his own Son but handed him over for us all, how will he also not give us everything else along with him?”³ St. Paul says. We’re not talking about crumbs! If God did not even spare His own son, will He not give us everything along with Him? How? We will discover that along the road.

Intervention. *I am really amazed by what you are saying. This morning, it was my turn to set up the booth for the CNSU (National Council of University Students) elections; since we also have elections within our university, we began a week ago. This morning, I was preparing the booth somewhat preoccupied, thinking to myself, “We’ve been here for a week, people must already be tired of us; we don’t even have coffee or cookies to offer to make people stop. It’s just us with our flyers. And then, why do we put in so much work when they may not even vote for us?” I was thinking all this, and at the same time I set up the table and pulled out the canopy, taken by the idea of perfection: we needed to have a perfect structure ready for something to happen. As I went to ask permission to use the space in the grass outside the university, I saw the others on the same shift as me: they had no coffee, no cookies, no structure except the flyers in their hands. I thought, “But everyone has already seen them!” To my surprise, these others started stopping every person who walked into the university. I was amazed. That was not all. Afterward, they wrote to us, “Tomorrow morning we will go out once again at 8:30, because manning the booth at 8:30 is like getting up at sunrise to go hiking in the mountains, it is something that changes you.” They told stories of encounters and of students who were struck, of people they had already seen and who came back to talk. From people who behave this way, who say, “I don’t need any structure, I am so grateful and certain of what is being given to me that I will take the initiative to encounter whoever is there,”*

you also see a new organization generated, to the point that one of them said, “Maybe tomorrow morning we will bring a thermos with coffee for the people we meet.” Instead, for me the prerequisite for something to happen was that there be a whole structure, and only later an “I.”

Carrón. Perfect. And what is it you understood?

Intervention. *I understood that what changes my life is not first of all a structure.*

Carrón. Yes, it is, in fact, the “I,” the movement of the “I” that changes you—but that, tomorrow, will also create a structure. What amazes you is that while you are stuck in your own attempt—which should always be an ironic one, as we were saying—there is another person through whom the Lord reaches you to free you and push you forward, correcting you. Do you see with what gentleness Christ corrects you? Almost without correcting you, without humiliating you, by simply making Himself present to you through a group of friends excited to distribute the flyer: “Tomorrow morning, 8:30. The booth is like getting up at sunrise to go hiking: it changes you!” He does not even scold you for getting stuck on the problem of creating a structure—no, no, no. He simply places before you something infinitely more attractive, freeing you even of the humiliation of correction. If you had not told us about it this evening, none of us would ever have known about it; you were carried a step further without even feeling humiliated. Do you all realize? Where does this happen if not within the Christian experience? Where do you find people like this? Most people humiliate you, don’t they? Here, there is no need. It seems to me that anyone can see what was gained by coming together this evening—I, at least, have seen it. Independent of the way any of us may have ended up coming here, the sacrifices they made, even if they were dragged here, perhaps against their will, anyone who has paid a minimal amount of attention cannot help but go home happy because of what he or she has seen,

³ Cf. Rm 8:32.

because of what happened in simply listening to others recount what happened to them and letting oneself be struck by what the Mystery set into motion inside them. One girl was changed—the first intervention said—and having started out reluctantly, she was surprised to find herself interested in the elections, having gained a faith she lacked before.

Do you understand the cultural significance of the kind of participation that we live, belonging to a place like this? A place that overcomes that most insidious plague of our culture, the general lack of trust, which is difficult to heal because it creeps into all the corners of our “I.” For a girl to wake up in the morning with that trust, made visible in her interest for things she ignored a year ago, documents how the Mystery continues to be present and how the celebration of Easter is not a fairy tale. “He is here, like the first day,” to use Péguy’s words, with a relevance and historical carnality capable of inspiring a new interest in life, of reawakening the “I,” just as happened to the friend of the person who spoke right after. He found something discordant in the way his old friends spent time together; he became aware of something that went by unobserved other times. Living immersed in the Christian community, with the same limitations everyone has, stumbling along like everyone, with all his ironic attempts, changed something in the depths of his “I” so that, at a cer-

tain point, he said to his old friends, “I can’t stand living in nothingness anymore.”

So, let’s begin to realize that the change has to do with the most important thing out there: our person. Our betrayal and our mistakes cause us not to love ourselves; they cause a lack of esteem for ourselves. Seeing what happens to others, however, in this place the Mystery gave me to build up my person, makes me go to bed changed: no longer hopeless, but at peace. In this way, a person begins to participate in that new life described by the liturgy during these days of the Easter season. It is a new life, not something virtual; it is a new life, real and new, with such an overabundance, such an overflowing richness, that it made it possible for our friend to lift his gaze once again to face the challenges in front of him—the elections to which he had long been dedicated—with all the desire he was capable of, almost as if it was a prayer. (“Doing all that I had to was like a huge prayer.”)

This is how the Mystery corrects our attempts, as another intervention demonstrated. But is our attempt enough? Yes, an attempt is enough; you just need to be open and willing—He will take care of the rest. Even if you reduce everything to a problem of structures, there is always someone who changes you because of the enthusiasm he lives, because of the grace God gives to him or to other friends. This helps

you recognize that everything is played out in the “I,” not in the structures, in our willingness to let ourselves be struck by another. We said the change is in recognizing One at work in our midst. It is as if we have started to give flesh to the words we listened to at the Exercises in December. If this is how we are beginning, just imagine what awaits us on the rest of our journey.

The elections are an opportunity, as we have seen. And not, first and foremost, because of the results you achieve. It can also be an opportunity because someone who meets people who campaign the way you do and goes home happy instead of hopeless, do you think that will have no influence on the vote? In fact, only what penetrates to touch the core of a person’s “I” can truly change the way he or she thinks. This is why I said that we also have to discover the political significance of what we are living. Otherwise, we end up reducing politics to a question of partisanship. And if that’s not interesting for you, go figure for everyone else! Discovering the political significance of what we live is part of the change that is needed in the way we conceive of politics, because all that is given to us by grace and that we seek to live is the good that all people await, beginning with us: we are all waiting for this good to happen, or happen again, in our lives. It is a good that we all desire. It is a “common good,” because it is what everyone is waiting for. ■